

# The American Teacher

*Democracy in Education; Education for Democracy.*

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## LEST WE FORGET

Plato, in his famous figure of the cave, pictures to us earthly man so engrossed with the shadow of things, that the realities of life and its eternal verities escape him altogether.

In like manner, the exacting duties of teaching have a tendency so to blind those engaged with its arduous labors, that many of us at times seem totally oblivious of the basic truths and fundamental principles that underlie our profession.

In our mad pedagogical whirl, in our wild chase after results, should we not now and then stop and ask ourselves Whither, and Why, and How?

# AN EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY

HENRY R. LINVILLE

ONE OF THE small high schools in New York City has undertaken recently a study of the supervision of the work of teachers. It has long been known that the results of supervision have not been satisfactory either to the supervising officers or to the teachers. But never before has a principal acted upon the idea that the experience and the point of view of the teachers might be of service as affording a basis for a scientific inquiry into the problem of supervision.

On the invitation of the principal of the school, the faculty elected its own committee to carry out such inquiry as seemed feasible. After some preliminary analysis of the general problem, the committee formulated a set of questions which it submitted to all the teachers. The questions were very generally answered. The committee then began its study of the material. The findings of the committee are presented here. It is to be hoped that they will prove suggestive to all who are interested in supervision, and encouraging to all who are interested in the development of initiative among the teachers of the nation.

**QUESTION 1.** What features in the present system of supervision seem to you to be lacking in fairness?

Number of answers, 27.

System considered unsatisfactory by 21; considered satisfactory by 6.

*Points of View Taken in Answers*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Number of visits too few and visits too short.....                      | 6 |
| 2. Judgments made on insufficient data .....                               | 3 |
| 3. The stress of criticism laid on matters of secondary importance .....   | 7 |
| 4. Lack of systematic plan for knowing what the teachers are doing .....   | 1 |
| 5. Failure to inform teachers of the nature of unfavorable criticism ..... | 3 |
| 6. Lack of consideration of unfavorable conditions .....                   | 3 |

7. No fault to find.....

*Comments Covering the Points of View*

1. "Stress is placed upon matters of secondary importance, so that the teacher's time and strength are taken from the main object, that of teaching. A teacher doing heavy work, with large classes and a full program, is rated on the same basis as a teacher with smaller classes and a lighter program."

2. "Lack of systematic plan for knowing what the teachers are actually doing. Lack of effort to find out from the teacher what she is trying to do. Apparent indifference to the right of the teacher to know the judgment of the principal. Snapshot judgments made on brief or infrequent visits."

3. "I do not recall any incident of unfairness in my experience of fifteen years."

4. "The fact that the supervising officer cannot possibly be acquainted with the teacher's work in the very few minutes spent in the class room. Ratings are often made upon the basis of two visits per term."

**QUESTION 2.** Under what conditions of time—

- length of visit
- number of visits
- time of day and week

Do you think it would be possible for the principal to obtain an accurate idea of your work?

Number of answers, 30.

**2a. Summary of Answers.** The length of time varies from 3 min. to a full period. Before an adverse report is made, the principal should spend a full period in the class.

*Comments.*

1. "Length of visits might vary in accordance with the interest of the principal, and in accordance with the receptiveness of the class and the teacher for his visit. But at some time he should stay an entire period."

After that length of time, the presence of the principal might become a bore."

2. "An accurate idea can be obtained by a short visit as well as by a long one. A long visit is a great strain both on teacher and on pupil."

3. "A sensitive principal may get a correct impression of the school atmosphere in some classes at once."

2b. *Summary of Answers.* There should be more than one visit in the term, especially before an adverse report is made. The visits should not be made to the same class.

#### Comments.

1. "Several visits should be made, especially before an unfavorable report."

2. "Preferably twice a term per course."

3. "At least twice a term to each grade of work. Some grades and some classes are much harder to teach than others."

2c. *Summary of Answers.* The general impression is that the time of day and week for visits should vary. It is that that Monday morning and Friday afternoon are unfavorable times for giving the best impression of the teachers' work.

#### Comments.

1. "Monday morning early and Friday afternoon late should be ruled out as visiting times."

2. "The time of day and week would make no difference if visits were made frequently."

3. "One visit at least should be made under favorable conditions of time, i.e., before pupils or teacher have spent their best efforts."

4. "If the visit is made the last period of the day, the principal should take into consideration the fact that teacher and pupil are not at their best at that time."

QUESTION 3. Under what circumstances—

- quality of class
- physical conditions in and near the room
- other considerations

Do you think it would be possible for the principal to obtain an accurate idea of your work?

Number of answers, 33.

3a. *Summary of Answers.* It would be fairest to visit the average class under favorable circumstances.

3b. *Summary of Answers.* The principal should take into consideration distracting physical conditions in and near the room, such as music and gymnastics. Other disadvantages are: over-crowded rooms, lack of blackboards, reciting in a laboratory with high stools, poor ventilation, lack of apparatus.

3c. *Summary of Answers.* The principal should be in a pleasant frame of mind, and not distract the attention of the pupils. The physical condition of the teacher should be considered.

QUESTION 4. To what extent should the principal's rating of a teacher be modified by the judgment of a head of department?

Number of answers, 32.

#### Points of View Taken in Answers

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Judgment should be modified by head to a very limited extent.. | 3                        |
| 2. Judgment should be modified by head to a considerable extent.. | 9                        |
| 3. Judgment should be modified by head almost entirely.....       | 1                        |
| 4. Weight should be with head of department .....                 | 6                        |
| 5. There should be agreement.....                                 | 2                        |
| 6. It depends upon the head.....                                  | 5                        |
|   | Head $6\frac{1}{2}$ 3 1  |
| 7. In the proportion of — — — 4                                   |                          |
|   | Prin. $3\frac{1}{2}$ 2 1 |

#### Comments.

1. "Where there is a variance of opinion, I think much weight should be attached to the judgment of the head of department. He has more time to observe, usually understands the subject-matter better than the principal, and is therefore cognizant of the difficulties with which the teacher is confronted, and is likely to be more sympathetic, altho at the same time just."

2. "The head of the department is in

every case a specialist in his subject, whereas the principal is a specialist in only one of the subjects in the school. The head of department thinking usually in terms of his subject can "size up" the work of a recitation and understand how it fits into the work of the term, whereas the principal, with his mind filled with details of school administration, cannot be expected to do this. The head of department can visit each member of his small group of teachers much more frequently than the principal can visit each member of the faculty."

**QUESTION 5.** How do you feel on the question of being informed of the nature of unfavorable criticism as soon as the visit is made?

Number of answers, 33.

*Points of View Taken in Answers*

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Want the criticism immediately, when visit is made, or as soon as possible.....         | 12 |
| 2. Want criticism soon, within a reasonable time, before the memory of lesson is lost..... | 5  |
| 3. Want it within a day.....   | 3  |
| 4. Want it within a week.....  | 3  |
| 5. Want it at the principal's convenience .....  | 1  |

*Comments.*

1. "Criticism should not be made immediately lest it partake of the nature of snap-judgment."
2. "If the criticism is about method or about the violation of instructions, criticism should be given at once. If it is about temperamental faults or lack of experience, then later or not at all."
3. "The criticism if just and sustained, will mean more to the teacher and can be acted upon to better advantage by him, if given while the matter is fresh in mind."

**QUESTION 6.** What is your attitude on the proposition that the principal be required to state definitely the reason why a teacher is given a mark below "B"?

Number of answers, 35.

Number believing the principal should give the reasons, 31. Two doubtful.

(By-law found to require it anyway.)

**QUESTION 7.** Do there seem to you to be elements of injustice in rating teachers on the per cent. of pupils who pass, and on the per cent. who sustain themselves? If so, what?

Number of Answers, 33.

There is injustice, 26.

There is no injustice, 5.

Non-committal, 2.

*Points of View Taken in Answers*

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Percentage basis of judgment unfair because it leaves out of account the quality and preparation of pupils, and the conditions in the class-room..... | 17 |
| 2. Unfair to charge to a teacher the failures of pupils who are absent frequently, and do not do the work.....   | 6  |
| 3. There would be a better chance of justice being done if percentages were computed in each subject without reference to other subjects .....           | 1  |
| 4. The character of "Regents" examinations is beyond our control; therefore unfair to charge failures on that account .....                              | 8  |
| 5. Faulty basis because of its mechanical nature.....  | 3  |
| 6. The percentage standard tends to compel teachers to pass pupils in self-defense.....  | 2  |
| 7. An inefficient teacher following an efficient teacher may discredit the efficient teacher.....  | 2  |
| 8. No injustice in the percentage basis .....  | 5  |
- Some teachers mention more than one of the above points.

*Comments.*

1. "Yes, because (1) classes vary in quality from year to year, so that equal teaching ability does not always produce the same per cent. of passed and sustained; also (2) because different subjects are different in their inherent difficulty, and equal teaching abilities in two might not produce equal per cent. of passed or sustained. The

only fair way is to compare the per cent. passed or sustained with that of other teachers in the same subject thruout the City, and considered thru several terms or years."

2. "There certainly does, unless some one can show how it may be a real help to an earnest teacher working under an efficient, helpful principal. The only advantage it has is that it is an easily operated, mechanical method. It would be all right and fair in factory work to be guided by such tabulations. In educational work, the child is the unit, each unit unlike any other. In our work it is absurd to rely on arbitrary, mechanical standards."

3. "No, we ought to be able to deliver results."

4. "There do; it is often impracticable to have all the teachers in a department assigned to work of even difficulty. A teacher with a preponderance of first-year classes cannot be expected to show so high a percentage of promotions as one whose classes are of greater age and experience."

**QUESTION 8.** What position do you take on the question of whether a teacher's skillfulness and accuracy in keeping records and making reports should be considered in term-end ratings?

Number of answers, 33.

*Points of View Taken in Answers*

1. The work is of value to the school, and perfectly justifiable as a regular assignment. It should be taken into account. 15
2. Clerical accuracy in teachers is commendable, but is not a matter of prime importance. Teachers are trained to be teachers, not clerks..... 17

*Comments.*

1. "I think such skill and accuracy should be considered in so far as they contribute to general efficiency in the mechanism of the school as a whole."
2. "It is a desirable quality of a teacher to be able to keep her books accurately, but it is not at all necessary to good teaching."

3. "I think that clerical accuracy, while very commendable, is not a matter of prime importance with a teacher. Teachers are trained and employed to be teachers, not clerks. Hence, while a little extra credit may be given to some teachers for exceptional ability and effort along that line to compensate for mediocrity in teaching, very little or no credit should be deducted because a teacher of good teaching ability does not happen to be an accurate clerk."

4. "I do not believe that more than ordinary skill and accuracy in the keeping of records should be considered in term-end ratings. If a teacher is unable to do this work, let him do something else. It is not fair to count against him that for which he was not trained. The doctrine of formal discipline teaches us that skill gained in one subject may be used in any other in so far as there are identical elements. A teacher trained in language work is not trained as a bookkeeper, and therefore cannot be expected to do record work with the accuracy of a trained clerk."

**QUESTION 9.** In the case of a teacher who is not accurate or skillful in keeping records, what degree of ability in other lines might be regarded as offsetting that deficiency?

Number of answers, 31.

Non-committal, 7.

*Points of View Taken in the Answers*

1. The ability to teach and inspire is more important than ability in a clerical capacity..... 18
2. If inaccuracy is due to indifference or carelessness, nothing should offset it. If due to ignorance, the teacher should be instructed, and held accountable ..... 1
3. Ability in each kind of work should be regarded by itself.. 5

*Comments.*

1. "Proper ability in each kind of work should be regarded by itself. I should hardly like to add apples and handkerchiefs and divide by two."



2. "First class ability as a teacher should practically cancel any ordinary deficiency as a clerk. The Board of Education employs clerks as clerks and teachers primarily as teachers."

3. "Does not the inability to follow instructions imply a fatal defect which nothing can offset? I am inclined to think so."

**QUESTION 10.** What are the special features of your work which you think are likely to be disregarded or overlooked by the principal?

Number of answers, 21.

Among the items mentioned are: The limitations of the pupils, and irregularity in attendance. In the work of the teacher, mention is made of certain matters which the principal is thot to overlook. Among them are effort, zeal, punctuality, self-control, care in preparation of lesson, work before and after school, personal influence on the children. The answers to this question seem somewhat doubtful in value, because they do not touch the points sought for when the question was framed.

**QUESTION 11.** Do you think a teacher's social conduct or characteristics in relation to other teachers and to pupils should be a matter for review or consideration by the principal?

Number of answers, 34.

Affirmative, 32.

Negative, 1.

Non-committal, 1.

#### *Comments.*

1. "Yes, there is no divine right of teachers by which they cease to be responsible to the social code set up by civilized humanity."

2. "No, it leads to petty tale-bearing on the part of teachers and students. A principal would not know of a teacher's relations except in a general way, unless he stooped to gossip."

**QUESTION 12.** Do you think it would be fair (if so, on what grounds) that the principal should note in term-end ratings, the case of any teacher who shows a notable deficiency in personal habits, or in temperament

and disposition, including lack of readiness to co-operate with the principal and with other teachers in the work of the school?

Number of answers, 30.

#### *Points of View Taken in Answers*

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Considering such qualities helps to make the school run more smoothly .....  | 10 |
| 2. The superior qualities that would be implied by noting personal deficiencies are essential in every teacher .....  | 4  |
| 3. When the qualities mentioned in the question can be shown to impair his instruction in his appointed subject, or the discipline in his subject classes.... | 1  |
| 4. The fact that boys and girls are naturally imitative is sufficient ground for considering the habits and temperament of teachers .....                     | 6  |

**QUESTION 13.** To what extent do you think the principal should recognize your efforts in developing in the pupils habits of honor, self-reliance, courtesy, orderliness and good physical posture?

Number of answers, 32.

#### *Points of View Taken in the Answers*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Efforts immeasurable; it is the duty of the teacher to foster these qualities to the fullest extent .....    | 9 |
| 2. Efforts should be recognized in words of encouragement from the principal .....                              | 3 |
| 3. These qualities count greatly in life's success .....  | 4 |
| 4. Success in developing these qualities should be considered no less important than teaching information ..... | 2 |
| 5. First of all duties, more important than formal information..  | 5 |

#### *Comments.*

1. "The city has schools to make good, efficient citizens; without these qualities, pupils do not become good citizens."

2. "To inculcate these good habits is one of the chief ends of education."

3. "A good teacher is a trainer and former of character; ability in these lines should be recognized."

QUESTION 14. How much consideration should be given a teacher for his efforts in bringing backward pupils up to grade?

Number of answers, 33.

Definite answers, 19.

Indefinite or non-committal answers, 14.

#### *Points of View Taken in Answers*

1. Teacher's duty, but bright pupils should not be neglected..... 3
2. Should be considered..... 19
3. Backward pupils should be taught correct habits of thinking. Bright pupils do not need so much teaching ..... 3
4. Minor matter; would value more highly the teacher who keeps most of his pupils up to grade all the time..... 2

#### *Comments.*

1. "All that is possible, but I should value more highly the teacher who can keep most of his pupils up to grade without these extra-curricula efforts. Do not let the pupils get the idea that the regular class work can be neglected, and all be made right in the after school class."

2. "The skill of bringing backward pupils up to grade seems to me to be one of the essentials of a successful teacher, and deserves quite a good deal of consideration. We all agree, I suppose, that the bright pupil does not need so much teaching. With them our power of exposition is not called upon to the same degree as it is when instructing backward pupils. In the latter we have first to develop correct habits of thinking. Their success is to the earnest teacher the realization of her efforts of energy, patience and perseverance."

3. "A certain amount of effort in bringing backward pupils up to grade is necessary, but if a teacher gives too much time to this work, the normal and the bright child suffer. I believe we have been neglecting the bright

child in our efforts to aid the backward one. Therefore I do not think an excess of effort for the backward child justifies extra consideration on the part of the principal. A teacher cannot develop that which is not inherent, and it is the bright child who will be the future leader."

QUESTION 15. To what extent, if any, should the principal consider in term-end ratings social service rendered to the school outside the class-room work?

Number of answers, 33.

#### *Points of View Taken in the Answers*

1. Should be considered so far as it affects the welfare of the school ..... 16
2. Marked ability should be recognized ..... 3
3. It may be considered to offset deficiencies in other lines..... 3
4. It should be considered in addition to, but not instead of teaching efficiency ..... 2
5. Constant refusal to have anything to do with social work should count against a teacher..... 2
6. Should not count much..... 4
7. Should count none..... 2

QUESTION 16. What characteristics of a good and efficient teacher seem to you to be *absolutely essential*?

Number of answers, 33.

The answers include mention of a wide range of qualities, which are grouped here for convenience under three heads, Intellectual, Pedagogical, and Temperamental and Social. The numerals indicate the number of times the several qualities were mentioned as essential.

#### *Intellectual*

- Knowledge of subject..... 19
- Ability to relate subject-matter to life ..... 5

#### *Pedagogical*

- Teaching ability ..... 16
- Ability to see child's point of view 4
- Power to interest pupils..... 10
- Power to develop ethical ideals.. 8
- Power to develop ability to think 6

Alive to changing ideals in teaching .....	2
Skill in questioning .....	2
Control of class .....	12
<i>Temperamental and Social</i>	
Cheerfulness .....	5
Sympathy .....	12
Courtesy .....	12
Willingness to co-operate.....	10
Fairness .....	9
Promptness and regularity.....	6
Effort .....	10
Self-control .....	11
Faithfulness to best ideals of life	5
Patience .....	6
Initiative .....	5
Sense of humor .....	2
Sincerity .....	1
Honesty .....	4
Strenuousness .....	2
Enthusiasm .....	4

QUESTION 17. What characteristics and abilities in those who supervise your work would you consider of most importance?

Number of answers, 26.

<i>Intellectual</i>	
Broad scholarship .....	12
Good judgment and sense of proportion .....	9
<i>Pedagogical</i>	
Teaching experience .....	3
Kindliness in criticism.....	4
Desire to be helpful to teachers..	6
<i>Temperamental and Social</i>	
Courtesy .....	3
Sympathy .....	5
Fairness .....	13
Power to command respect of community .....	2
Tactfulness .....	2
Willingness to discuss a difference of opinion .....	3
Self-control .....	7

Frequent mention was made of the following requisite "abilities": Executive ability, ability to show appreciation of work done, ability to judge human nature, ability to give criticism without offense, ability to appreciate problems of work, ability to avoid undue friction, ability to give constructive criticism.

#### Comments.

1. "Calmness, appreciation of problems, fairness, open-mindedness, personal experience in class-room work of long extent and of not too remote date. It is my firm belief that these qualities, the last as much as any other, should be demanded of all the administrative force of the Board of Education, above the rank of clerk."

2. "Poise, good judgment, fairness, ability to administer without undue friction, helpfulness to teacher and to pupil; standing in the community, and ability to command respect in public; general scholarship; integrity of character."

3. "A sense of proportion that will enable a superior officer to know the relative importance of the various phases of a teacher's work, and to judge them accordingly."

4. "One who supervises should first be a scholar in one or more subjects, so that he may understand the scholar's point of view. He should have an open mind, and should never assume that those who differ from him are necessarily wrong. He should convince those whose work he examines of his absolute fairness. He should have a mind that waits upon the exposition of a proposition given by someone else beside himself. He should have an equable temper, in order that he may give assurance of courtesy to those he may have to judge."

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of Prof. Edward C. Elliott's report to the School Inquiry Committee of the Board of Estimate of New York City, there has been much speculation among teachers on the matter of how a supervisory council, such as Prof. Elliott has recommended, might be put into effective operation.—THE AMERICAN TEACHER will publish in the April number an article by Prof. Elliott, on "The Supervisory Council."



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*This paper seeks to advance the status of the teacher to the dignity and the influence of a profession, by advocating high standards of admission to the calling; by urging an extension of the opportunities for the participation of teachers in the direction of educational affairs; and by supporting the organization of teachers for all legitimate professional purposes.*

## TRAINING TEACHERS FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

AT THE Normal College of New York City the students have been organized into a self-governing system that gives the young ladies practise in conducting themselves with proper decorum when not under the surveillance of teachers and policemen. The proctor system, as it is called, is not only meeting with immediate success, but it is training the prospective teachers in the arts of self-government, arts that the workers in this field have sadly neglected for a long time. There is hope.

## POLITICS, POLITICS, POLITICS!

IT IS JUST a year since the School Committee of Boston adopted resolutions prohibiting all kinds of "political" action on the part of the public school teachers. The conditions that lead up to these resolutions were deplorable enough, and were described in THE AMERICAN TEACHER in March, 1912. We pointed out at the time, and since, that the remedy for "political" action on the part of teachers is to be found not in the prohibition of such action, but in an organization of the school business that will make it possible for teachers to secure their rights and advance their legitimate interests without resorting to politicians.

The Boston prohibition has apparently been in force for a year. A few weeks ago the new School Committee received a letter from the Boston Teachers' Club requesting permission to send representatives to the state legislature to give testimony in regard to two measures pending before the body—one of the bills has to do with tenure of office and the other relates to retirement allowances. The chairman of the School Committee seems to have seen visions of hordes of teachers overwhelming the poor legislators. Another member of the Committee could not see how a dozen might be permitted and the rest constrained, if they wished to go. A third suggested that permission might be given to a few but not to a "large number." A fourth thot that the Committee could not give the teachers any permission at all. "They have a perfect right to go there," he is reported to have said! (He must have been one of the very new members of the Committee.) Superintendent Dyer thot that the teachers could be trusted to do nothing inadvisable, and then the matter was referred to the chairman and the secretary to decide later.

At a public hearing before the School Committee, held on the following Monday (Feb. 10) vigorous protests against the so-called "gag-rule" were voiced by public-spirited citizens, politicians and—teachers. Besides the president of the State Federation of Teachers, Mr. Ernest Makechnie, and the president of

a Parents' Association, Miss Mary Locke of the Washington School, Miss Cora E. Bigelow, Kindergartner in the Plummer School, Miss Catherine McGinley of the Dorchester High School and Principal George C. Mann of the West Roxbury High School also spoke. It is well for teachers to know that those who took the trouble to appear at this hearing were not merely persons who could be suspected of being "interested" in a sinister sense. Voters' Associations, physicians, the Central Labor Union and parents were represented—in addition to representatives and legislators.

In another large city a teacher had served a probationary term in one of the schools without, apparently, giving satisfactory service. The superintendent decided that his services were no longer desirable. The principal thought that the teacher was at least tolerable and made a personal plea for a reconsideration of the case. The superintendent has his standards and these the teacher had not met; the case was not re-opened. The teacher took the matter into his own hands, and appeared at the office of the superintendent with a card from a professional politician. The case was re-opened, and within a week the teacher was back at his desk.

We can easily picture to ourselves the chagrin of any right-minded educator compelled by external, irrelevant circumstances to stultify himself in this fashion. A man of high ideals, as this superintendent undoubtedly is, must truckle to an unprincipled exploiter of political exigencies, while a presumably incompetent teacher laughs in his sleeve!

How can a superintendent with high ideals and with high standards maintain the efficiency of his system and his own self-respect? Certainly not by receiving favors from politicians and putting himself under obligation to them. Certainly not by conducting the schools despotically and depriving himself of the support of the teachers. Favoritism, tho closely allied to good-will, and autocracy, tho often benevolent, can not take the place of justice and co-opera-

tion. Favoritism and autocracy breed politics and intrigue, they stifle initiative and destroy responsibility, they discourage devotion and kill true loyalty. In the interests of the supervisory officers, no less than in the interests of the teachers, school administration must be completely separated from politics, all appointments and promotions must be based on determined qualifications, that those engaged in carrying on the public's most important service may be under obligation only to the public and loyal to their highest ideals.

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### FOR OPTIMISTS

UPON THE APPEARANCE of the first sections of the report of the Hanus Committee, the New York City Superintendent of Schools issued a circular to the principals, calling upon them to meet and elect from among their numbers sixty representatives, from among whom the Superintendent would later appoint a committee of twenty to confer upon the findings and recommendations in the reports, with a view to utilizing for the school system such ideas and suggestions as would be found feasible. This is a great step forward and should be met by the teachers as evidence of the sincere desire on the part of the Superintendent to utilize whatever intelligence and capacity for constructive criticism may lie latent in the layers of the service below the superintendents. The method pursued is not altogether a democratic one, but it is a real concession to a principle for which THE AMERICAN TEACHER has always stood; and as such we welcome it.

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HAVE YOU SENT IN  
YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

## CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

INTEREST IN THE age-long question of corporal punishment is once more being manifested in educational circles and in public discussion in New York City.

THE AMERICAN TEACHER recently sent to a limited number of principals in the City an inquiry that was calculated to direct their attention to some important phases of the problem, for the purpose of obtaining from them a definite expression of their judgments. We publish in this number the answers that have been received in the brief time given for returning replies. Later replies will be published in the April number.\*

### *The Questions.*

- (1) Do the teachers feel the need for more drastic disciplinary measures equally in all grades?

If so, is it because there is a certain proportion of children who are not amenable to the ordinary methods used by teachers?

And are these particular pupils likely to be permanently improved in character by the application of corporal punishment during the early stages of their careers?

Or will they need continual application for the purpose of keeping them in check, that the school work may be carried on in spite of their presence?

- (2) If these insubordinate and defiant pupils appear in larger proportions in the later grades, is it because they have been demoralized by the weak discipline in the lower grades, or because the instincts their conduct expresses develop only at a later stage?

In either case, is corporal punishment desirable for the younger pupils before these instincts appear?

Or can any form of discipline anticipate the disagreeable manifestations of these instincts?

- (3) Would the permission to apply corporal punishment be considered by

teachers as a permanent solution of the problem of discipline?

Or would it be considered by them as a temporary measure of relief until a new generation of children can be adjusted to their social relations without the use of physical force?

- (4) What alternative methods for meeting the situation suggest themselves to you?

\* \* \*

The following is from Dr. James Sullivan, Principal of Boys' High School, Brooklyn:

Replying to your inquiry on corporal punishment, I would say that we do not feel that we need such a power in the high school. Undoubtedly, we, from time to time, receive boys into the school whose characters would have been much improved had they been subjected to corporal punishment in their earlier years. The time for application of corporal punishment is at that stage of a child's life where it is impossible to make moral suasion effective. There are instances literally by the thousands which we can retail to show that corporal punishment has deterred children from doing things that they have been permitted thru sheer animal instincts to do. The number of children who need a constant application of corporal punishment is very small. All are in need of it at certain times in their lives.

I feel that the presence of insubordinate and defiant pupils in the later grades is because they have been demoralized by the weak discipline in the lower grades and that discipline is weak because of the fact that the teacher lacks the power to administer corporal punishment. There are, of course, exceptional individuals who will remain insubordinate thruout their school careers. Such people, however, border on the criminal element. I do not feel that there is any form of discipline which is so efficacious as corporal punishment for the naughty little tricks which children do as a very part of their being. I believe that even with corporal punishment,

\* All our readers who feel inspired to take up this discussion in our columns are invited to contribute letters of about 200 words.

there would be always present certain problems of discipline, but that the ability of a teacher to apply such corporal punishment would diminish to a very large extent, the numerous cases which now come up before her. Personally, I am one of those who believe that small children pass thru certain stages where only the infliction of physical pain serves to cure and cure immediately their little faults.

\* \* \*

Miss Alida S. Williams, Principal of F. S. 33, Manhattan, writes to say that there is need of more drastic disciplinary measures in all grades of boys' classes. A certain proportion of children are not amenable to the ordinary methods used by teachers.

Refractory pupils are likely to be permanently improved in conduct by corporal punishment. Whether they can be improved in character, who can tell?

One application of corporal punishment will be enough in most cases to convince defiant pupils of their folly. Insubordinate and defiant pupils appear in larger proportions in the later grades, because they have been demoralized by the weak discipline in the lower grades.

It is not necessarily evil instincts that causes pupils to be defiant, but merely a very human desire to have their own way. In the case of younger pupils the punishment naturally should not be too severe. In any case, the traditional and proven rod is the only solution.

There has been no change in children since Solomon wrote his opinion of the consequences of sparing the rod.

\* \* \*

The Principal of a well-known elementary school in the Boro of Manhattan has granted to the Editor the opportunity of examining documents that contain abundant evidence of the existence in the schools not only of defiant pupils, but even of clearly criminal pupils. The presence of these socially depraved pupils in a school only subjects innocent pupils to evil influences.

It is apparent that corporal punishment can be of little use in dealing with the

criminal group, since the notoriety connected with severe punishment is scarcely less agreeable than the pleasure of defying school and social regulations.

The consistent policy of the Principal has been to co-operate with the owners of property damaged or stolen by his criminal pupils, as well as with the officers of the Children's Court. In that way depraved boys are quickly removed from association with those boys who are still amenable to some kind of school discipline. Reformatory institutions may then take up their problem of doing the best they can with the cases that cannot be handled in our schools.

One solution of the bad boy problem is the establishment of parental schools, located according to the needs of the school population. Pupils who appear to be temporarily incorrigible could be sent to these schools and kept under definite control from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. The exceptional pupils designated to attend these schools should be compelled to attend longer hours, and would do motor rather than bookish work. They should be made to feel that as soon as their conduct for an entire term warranted the change, they would be entitled to return to the ordinary school. It is obvious that in such an institution corporal punishment, or any other coercive measures that may be necessary, should be employed.

The final suggestion of the Principal is that the elimination of the exceptional child from the average school, together with the proper classification of the remaining pupils, would leave a type of child who under the supervision of efficient teachers would be amenable to the ordinary methods of discipline, and would be interested in instruction.

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A child may seem lawless, opposed to the very idea of government, when in reality he is only objecting to a particular ruler and the kind of rule which he is carrying out.—SULLY, *Studies in Childhood*.

Sometimes it's the same way with an adult.

## THE BOARD AND THE TEACHER

WE DESIRE to advance day by day the condition of the social fabric around us. We know that education is not a matter of machinery, but primarily of spirit. We believe that from this board of education, this highest body in our school world, this cupola of the educational structure, a spirit can come which will unify the whole organization. No army is worthy of the name unless its spirit is high. No work depends so much on spirit as that which teachers do.

We should make a fatal error if we fail to recognize that the teacher is the essential factor of the work we are organized to do. There was education before there were commissioners or superintendents, but there was never a school or schooling without a teacher.

No problem of this board is more definite than that of putting and keeping a teacher in the best condition to give the best service. It is suicidal to the system to harass and irritate her with rules and requirements, to bind her with red tape. The teacher's knowledge of the school situation is first hand. In a school reduced to its simplest terms a teacher makes all the plans, adjusts all the difficulties. In a completely organized system she makes no plans, adjusts nothing. Thereby the system deprives itself of the most valuable knowledge and advice.

There is no more necessary single advantage needed by this board than the usage of teacher co-operation by which information and suggestions bearing on the needs of the school can be obtained.

The era of criticism thru which we have passed has brought forth concrete recommendations that must be pondered. This era of criticism should be succeeded by an era of construction. The trend of public opinion and professional opinion is in one direction and irresistible. Whoever is hostile to these new ideas will find objection futile. All that opposing forces can accomplish with benefit is to contribute the element of national conservatism to the inevitable result.—From Inaugural Address of THOMAS W.

CHURCHILL, as President Board of Education, New York City.

## PROF. McMURRY'S REPORT

Dr. Frank McMurry in his report on "The Quality of Classroom Instruction" (in the City of New York) concludes that the attitude of the rank and file of class-room teachers is not satisfactory. His investigations show that the teachers, as a rule, are conscientious and energetic; but in respect to their profession, they are static and depressed. Their complaints, in accounting for this state of affairs are as follows:

(1) They are hampered by lack of authority either to punish unusually troublesome children adequately, or to have them punished. The result in many a room is a constant struggle to "get on some way or other," leading to limitless waste of time and energy, and not seldom to loss of health by the teacher.

(2) They do not feel free. They are given no authoritative voice in helping to select the curriculum that they must present, or in dividing the time among the several studies, or in choosing the text-books that they use, or often, even, in determining the methods that they follow. On every hand they are directed what to do, and how to do it.

Under these conditions, they cannot be expected to develop the initiative and individuality of their pupils; they are not allowed initiative or self-expression themselves; obedience is their leading merit; there is little provision, in the entire system, for their own individuality. More than that, any independent efforts that they might make in the direction of organizing subject matter in a new way, or of stressing relative value to an unusual degree, or of providing for motive in an original manner would run the risk of disapproval by their superiors.

(3) There is a lamentable lack of inspiring leadership by those persons in authority over them, i. e., the principals, special supervisors, and super-



intendents. The main relation of superintendents to them is that of inspectors merely, or judges, not of helpers; and the principals are too busy with other matters, or unable, for other reasons to come to their aid in a vigorous, constructive manner. In consequence no one in the system is discussing aims and principles with them and showing how these should affect their teaching.

New York is sure to profit from a careful consideration of this report, but the benefits must be made to reach every town and city in the land.

### TEACHERS' WELFARE

THE New York State Teachers' Association has created a new committee, called the Board of Teachers' Welfare, which is intended to secure for the teachers of the State the following advantages:

1. A minimum salary of \$50 a month. (This minimum has been established by legislation in Indiana and Pennsylvania.)
2. Protected tenure of office. Permanent tenure after a probationary period.
3. Extension of the pension system to include district superintendents.
4. Better school-room accommodations, better physical conditions, such as ventilation, sanitation, etc.
5. A maximum limit to the number of pupils placed in a room. (Thruout the state the number in a room varies from 20 to 120.)
6. A "sabbatical" leave after from three to five years of service, either for rest or for study, with part payment.

This is a good program, for a beginning, and should develop the solidarity of the country school teachers, as well as arouse their enthusiasm. After a while we shall learn that high standards pay, not only for the employing public, but for the employed workers, in the teaching business as everywhere else.

THE TAXPAYER frequently complains that the troublesome youth whom the teacher cannot manage puts upon the community the additional burden of supplying him with parental schools, with truant officers, or even with complete maintenance. And frequently the teacher who has been plagued by such troublesome pupils joins the taxpayer in denouncing conditions that give the "good" pupil a minimum of the public expenditure, the good-for-nothing a maximum. The trouble with these complaints is not as to the facts: it is a matter of outlook. If we look upon the free text-books and free stationery and play-grounds and concerts as forms of charity administered by the public agencies, we should demand that the most "worthy" be given the largest share of the goods things. If, however, we look upon the public expenditures as positive means for advancing the common welfare, or if we consider them even as forms of insurance, we must demand that every dollar be spent where it will do the most good—not to the person who gets the dollar for the book or the soup, but to the community as a whole. It is cheaper to give the good-for-nothing this expensive special attention and neglect the boys and girls who are "naturally good" than to reverse the process.

HAPPILY, we have moved a long way from the days of ancient Greece and Rome, where teachers frequently were slaves and held in low esteem. As society becomes more and more conscious of its own imperative need of him, and above all, as he proves himself, so will the teacher come into his own.—Arthur C. Perry, in "Outlines of School Administration."

## TEACHERS WHO DON'T KNOW THE MEANING OF OUR FLAG

WE OF THE United States seem to have turned the Bible out of the public schools and put in the flag, and since religion is needed in education the disposition is now to have a flag religion with an appropriate ritual.

Better than none, no doubt. Its defects, at least, are like the defects of other religions. It is adopted and straightway inconsiderate people want to enforce it by compulsion. As if that had not been sufficiently tried out in the last thousand years. If it were ordered that public-school children should read the Bible and some of them wouldn't, to compel them would be recognized as religious persecution. But when it is ordered that they shall salute the flag and a few take a notion not to, the compulsory measures that sometimes follow are not recognized as of the family of our old friend who kindled fires at Smithfield and was so handy with the thumb-screw and the rack.

Two little school-girls in Salt Lake City got the idea that they were Socialists (the paper says) and wouldn't salute the flag. Whereupon the Utah State Teachers' Association, finding a lack of temporal authority to regulate these young politicians, passed a recommendation for an amendment to the State constitution making the teaching of patriotism compulsory in the public schools.

Who will teach these teachers, first that the State constitution is not a fit place to record rules about schools, and, second, that compulsory patriotism, like compulsory religion, is not worth anything when taught? Don't the teachers know that our flag stands for freedom and that freedom is a condition from which all unnecessary compulsions have been eliminated?—*Harper's Weekly*, Jan 11, 1913.

No, Colonel, they don't, generally. That's one of the things we have been trying to teach them.

## DISCONTENT

I am Discontent.

I am the Foe of Things as They are.

The Fighter for Things as They Ought to Be.

It was my unrest with Chaos that brought about the ordered Universe.

And my presence in the brain of the Anthropoid Ape was the beginning of Human Progress.

Thru the ages I have burned in the hearts of men, driving them ever forward to better things.

I have been the Inspiration of poets, the Urge of warriors, the Impulse of statesmen and the Ardor of martyrs.

Greed and Tyranny and Sloth and Privilege have ever reviled me, for they held me in fear, knowing me for their inevitable doom.

Kingdoms and Empires have risen and fallen because of me, deserts have blossomed for me. Creeds and religions have come and gone for my sake.

I am the spirit of Invention, of Achievement, of Reform.

I am the lover of True Order, but the hater of Established Evil and Vested Injustice.

I am the flame in which the Dross of things is consumed that the Pure Metal may remain.

I make the Thinkers think and the Dreamer dream.

I am Doubt, I am Change, I am Progress.

I am Discontent.—Berton Braley, in the *Industrial Worker*.

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We place side by side an extract from the "revolutionary" *Industrial Worker* and one from the "respectable" *Harper's Weekly*. Both deserve the thoughtful consideration of teachers. Altho the writer of one of these may not endorse the words of the other, they have much in common; and there is sound sense behind both utterings.

## TO THE PRESS

THE NEWSPAPERS of this country are generally in close sympathy with the purposes and ideals of the public schools. At any rate, those that are not sincere manage to conceal their hypocrisy behind columns of good words.

The schools in your town are wonderfully inadequate in some one particular. For example, you may have insufficient school accommodation, or the classes are too large, or the teachers are of a low standard, or there is lack of suitable supervision. It may be that not every defect is remediable; but nearly every defect can be remedied with hard cash. Now what has this or that newspaper done to fix public attention upon some

particular defect, and to keep the attention there until the defect is remedied?

We should like to see some of these guardians of the public welfare manifest their concern in some such way as this: Offer a prize for the best statement, by a teacher in your public schools, of the reasons why (e. g.) the size of classes should be reduced to forty or thirty, or any other number. Offer a whole string of prizes, and get all the teachers interested. Keep the hammering up long enough to get a "reaction" from the public on the one hand, and from the responsible authorities on the other.

Then you will have accomplished a real service for the "public." Incidentally, you may also discover the extent of your "influence."

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